

CALFED
Water Use Efficiency Program

Independent Review Panel
on
San Joaquin Valley
Agricultural Water Conservation Potential

Background

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program is a cooperative effort among state and federal agencies and the public to ensure a healthy ecosystem, reliable water supplies, good quality water, and stable levees in California's Bay-Delta system. The Water Use Efficiency Program is one of six Program elements common to each of the three potential solutions CALFED has developed. The Water Use Efficiency Program represents a significant investment in the system and will greatly reduce system conflicts.

The Water Use Efficiency Program (as described in the draft programmatic EIS/EIR, March 1998) has attracted more comments from environmental, agricultural, and urban stakeholders than any other part of the CALFED program. Most of these comments express concerns in two categories: 1) conservation potential; and 2) assurances. An Independent Review Panel on San Joaquin Valley agricultural water conservation potential will be convened to address part of the conservation issue. The comments related to assurances are being addressed through separate efforts with CALFED agencies and stakeholders.

Comments related to conservation projections are rooted in concerns that CALFED may be improperly forecasting conservation potential and, therefore, proposing an inappropriate mix of actions to improve water supply reliability. In response, the CALFED agencies have asked staff to convene the Independent Review Panel in time for its conclusions to be reflected in the revised draft programmatic EIS/EIR, which is due for publication in mid-December. This requires that the panel work on an accelerated timeline.

Objective

The Independent Review Panel will review the technical assumptions and approach of the agricultural conservation sections of the CALFED Water Use Efficiency Component Technical Appendix (Ag Section).

It is anticipated that the panel will consider the following questions in meeting its objective:

1. Are the technical assumptions of the Ag Section correct and complete?
2. Which agricultural water conservation/management practices are technically and

economically feasible in the CALFED solution area?

3. What are the potential Delta-related benefits of these feasible practices (such as reduced water use, reduced drainage, improved instream water quality, reduced impacts of water exports on Delta water quality and Delta ecosystem health)?
4. What is the preferred approach for quantifying the potential Delta-related benefits of agricultural water conservation/management in the CALFED solution area?
5. What additional data collection and research are required for pursuing the preferred approach?

The Independent Review Panel will not be expected to develop numerical values. Rather, due to scheduling constraints, the Panel will be asked to describe potential agricultural conservation/management benefits in general or programmatic terms.

Process

Formulate Independent Review Panel: A panel consisting of three to five technical experts will be formulated to meet the criteria listed below (see Panel Members). Stakeholders will be invited to nominate panel members. CALFED staff, in consultation with the panel facilitator (CONCUR), will make final panelist selections. CALFED anticipates paying a stipend to panel members.

Solicit/Confirm Stakeholder Technical Representatives: Stakeholders will be encouraged to name technical representatives to provide additional information to the Independent Review Panel. Stakeholders will be asked to select representatives who: 1) have expertise in relevant areas; 2) have strong communication skills; and 3) are willing to disclose their various affiliations. We will attempt to limit the number of stakeholder technical representatives to nine (three agricultural, three environmental, and three agency). Stakeholders will be asked to submit the names of technical representatives to CALFED no later than October 9.

Pre-Panel Briefing: The Independent Review Panel will initially be briefed on relevant issues through a distributed information packet. Panel members will be asked to study the briefing materials and will be allowed to request additional information. All distributed information and information requests will be provided to each panel member and stakeholder technical representative.

Panel Session: The Independent Review Panel will attempt to meet their objective through deliberations during a public multi-day session. Stakeholder technical representatives will be invited to provide additional background information and to observe the deliberations.

The panel will be convened jointly by CALFED staff and a professional facilitation team. The facilitation team will also handle most meeting logistics. The primary deliverable of the panel session will be preliminary findings and a report outline. Panel members will be provided the opportunity to submit minority opinions.

Members may be given additional assignments at the close of the panel session. Possible assignments include refinement of findings or writing assignments.

Public Participation: A broad range of stakeholders and other interested parties will be invited by CALFED to observe the Independent Review Panel. The public will be given periodic opportunities to address the panel.

Report Production: CALFED staff and the facilitation team will be responsible for producing a written report of the panel's findings. A preliminary draft will be produced and circulated for review by panel members. The panel members will be required to communicate directly with the facilitation team and CALFED staff to propose specific changes to the draft. Given the accelerated timeline, only one review/revision cycle is anticipated. The facilitator will integrate comments and produce the final report.

Deliverable

The Independent Review Panel's primary deliverable will be their final written report, including any minority opinions. Conclusions from this report are expected to be reflected in the revised draft programmatic EIS/EIR.

Schedule

To allow inclusion in the CALFED Revised Report (scheduled for release in mid-December), the entire panel process must be completed by mid-November. This requires an extremely ambitious schedule and the following deadlines:

- Formulate Independent Review Panel: October 6
- Confirm Stakeholder Technical Representatives: October 9
- Distribute Briefing Materials: October 9
- Conduct Panel Session: October 19-21
- Distribute Draft Report: October 30
- Finalize Report: November 10

Independent Review Panel Members

Stakeholders will be invited to nominate technical experts for the Independent Review Panel. Tom Gohring will select the panel members with input from other CALFED staff and CONCUR. The criteria for selection will include: 1) technical capability to cover the required disciplines, 2) non-alignment with any stakeholder groups; 3) ability to work collaboratively as technical advisors on policy issues; and, 4) availability.

The panel must collectively provide an expert understanding of on-farm and district conservation practices (to determine feasible practices) and the hydrologic and hydraulic connections between the CALFED solution area and the Delta (to determine Delta impacts). As a result, the panel's technical expertise will likely include agricultural, civil, or irrigation engineering, hydrology/hydraulics, and possibly agricultural or resource economics.

Panel Logistics and Management

The panel will be managed by a team that includes CALFED staff and a facilitation team (CONCUR). The CALFED staff representative, Tom Gohring, is on loan from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. The facilitation team from CONCUR includes Scott McCreary and Bennett Brooks, who will co-facilitate meetings, and Lisa Whitman, who will serve as meeting recorder. The facilitation team will also handle most meeting logistics.